

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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ATLANTIC SALMON RETURN TO CONNECTICUT RIVER HAILED AS MAJOR EVENT

The return of adult Atlantic salmon to the Connecticut River was documented June 3 when a commercial fisherman netted a splendid one.

The 11-1/4-pound, 33-inch-long, adult salmon is the first hard evidence that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and several New England States' restoration program on four major rivers in the Northeastern United States has taken hold on a river outside of Maine. Others are very likely to be thriving in the Connecticut River if one was caught, scientists said.

Other major rivers involved in this restoration program which began in 1967 are the Penobscot and Union Rivers in Maine, and the Merrimack River in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The appearance of salmon in Connecticut is viewed as a major event by fish biologists. Many thought rivers outside of Maine could never again support this hardy fish because they are south of the Gulf of Maine where cold ocean currents flow.

Of those four rivers, Atlantic salmon have only been reestablished in significant numbers in the cold clear waters of the Penobscot and Union Rivers.

The fish caught June 3 was stocked in a brook in Massachusetts in March 1973 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a one ounce, six inch pre-smolt--a stage when the fish's body changes to allow it to migrate from fresh to salt water. It was reared at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hatchery in Berlin, New Hampshire, from eggs collected in the St. Lawrence River in 1970.

All four of these rivers were formerly native spawning sites for this beautiful fish, which was almost exterminated by the mid-19th Century because of dam construction, river pollution, and over-fishing on its North Atlantic feeding grounds.